

Dragonshards

The Elves of Aerenal, Part One

By Keith Baker



On the island of Aerenal, the boundaries between life and death have worn thin. The Aereni elves preserve their greatest heroes through magic and faith, and these deathless have provided protection and guidance for thousands of years.

Elven civilization began on the continent of Xen'drik. For thousands of years, the elves were enslaved and oppressed by the powerful nations of the giants. Thirty-nine thousand years ago the elves rose up against the giants . . . but this was a war both sides would ultimately lose. At the height of the conflict, a visionary named Aeren foresaw a coming cataclysm; she gathered a host of elves and convinced them to flee the approaching storm. As dragonfire and terrible magic shattered Xen'drik, the elven fleet landed on the island that would become their home. Aeren guided the elves to this land, but she never saw it with her own eyes; a wasting disease took her life during the long voyage. After interring their prophet in the soil of their new home, the leaders named their land Aerenal, "Aeren's Rest."

Though they had joined together beneath Aeren's banner, the refugees came from many different tribes with a range of traditions and beliefs. They shared a common reverence for their ancestors and the heroes who had died in the cause of freedom. While the elves were a martial culture, Aeren had said that arcane knowledge was the greatest weapon of all, and the majority of the elves chose to set aside the sword for the book. Calling themselves the Aereni, these elves dedicated themselves to the study of magic and mysticism. One of their greatest interests was the art of necromancy; in their reverence for their ancestors, the elves were determined to find a way to preserve their heroes. In time, two schools of thought came to dominate the field of necromancy: the techniques of the line of Vol, which many blame for the spread of vampirism into Khorvaire; and the traditions of the Priests of Transition, which focused on positive energy and the power of Irian. Ultimately it was the positive path that took root in the land, and the lines united behind the cult of the deathless. The Undying Court has ruled the land for over twenty thousand years, and today the deathless are inextricably linked to Aereni society.

Aerenal Today

In the cities of Aerenal, life and death stand side by side. The streets are lined with cenotaphs and memorials far older than human civilization, monuments to the ancient history of the elves and the heroes of previous eras. While this fascination with the fallen may seem morbid to outsiders, it pales by comparison to the presence of the undying. While the members of the Undying Court remain in the city of Shae Mordai, younger deathless can be found across Aerenal. Few foreigners can tell the difference between the deathless and the undead, and as a result travelers often describe Aerenal as a land where the living consort with zombies and liches.

Beyond its fascination with the death and the deathless, Aerenal is a land that looks to the past to shape the present. The Aereni elves place tradition above all else: Artists and bards are expected to perfect ancient techniques instead of developing new styles. The elves apply themselves to their work with uncanny devotion; an elven bowyer may spend centuries honing his skills, and produce bows the like of which a human craftsman could only dream. But he still follows the traditions of the past, and the bow he makes today is a mirror of one that could be found in a 5,000-year-old tomb. Magic is the only field where innovation is encouraged, since the Aereni believe that there is no such thing as perfection when it comes to the arcane arts. But even here, the

elves often find themselves blinded by their traditions; as a result, the magical talents of the younger races are becoming a match for the Aereni.

While people from all nations come to do business at the port of Pylas Talaer, foreigners are rarely welcome elsewhere in Aerenal. Unlike Riedra, no restrictions exist on travel across Aerenal, and adventurers can move freely through the land. But the elves have little patience for members of the younger races. Elf wizards and sages dedicate themselves to their studies, while Aereni artisans devote themselves to their crafts. Even farmers and other laborers pursue their duties with astonishing devotion, seeking perfection in all that they do. Outsiders are a distraction. They are often loud, rude, or simply ignorant, and they disrupt the order of Aerenal. So adventurers are allowed to travel unhindered through the land -- but they are rarely made welcome or catered to in any way. Furthermore, the laws of the land are swift and harsh. Crime is a rare occurrence among the Aereni, and they have no patience for those who disturb this peace. An Aereni magistrate may use *zone of truth* or other forms of divination to confirm the facts of a crime. But the word of the magistrate is final, and a criminal has no rights. While exile is more common than execution, the wise rogue will ply his trade in a more lenient land.

Elven Lines

The nation of Aerenal is an alliance of lines, which serve the Sibling Kings and the Undying Court: Melideth, Jhaelian, Mendyrian, Vaerol, and Tolaen, to name but a few. Each line is descended from one of the tribes that followed the prophet Aeren from Xen'drik. As a result, a line is not a single family: It is a city-state containing a dozen or more separate families, bound together by common history. Thus you can be part of the line of Jhaelian while having the family name Dolorenthi.

Each line is led by a noble house, and by tradition only the members of these houses can be raised as deathless. But membership in a noble house is *not* hereditary. Aereni nobles are chosen, not born: The current members of the house select their successors from among the most remarkable members of their line. Aereni nobles do not even breed among their house; instead, they breed with other members of the line, keeping the noble blood spread throughout the community. For the Aereni, reproduction and marriage are two entirely separate things: marriage is about love, while children are a concern of the entire community. The Aereni believe that their island is a sacred land, and that it can support only so many souls; given their practice of preserving the dead, population control is a serious issue. An elf must earn the right to sire or bear a child, and the nobility has the right to determine the match that has the most promise. As a result, the elves of a particular line see all members of the line as part of an extended family.

Every member of an elven community has the potential to rise to the nobility and from there to the Undying Court. Normally, nobles are chosen based on the skills that they display, and this is why the elves spend centuries honing their talents. But in recent years, younger elves have sought to prove their worth through exploits in foreign lands, battling the Order of the Emerald Claw or seeking the magical secrets of Xen'drik. As an adventurer, this is likely to be the path you have chosen: Your heroic deeds may be your ticket to immortality!

To date, no half-elf has ever been raised to a noble house. But a few Khoravars have rejoined the lines of their ancestors. Aereni pride and prejudice make the prospect of a half-elf noble an unlikely one. But anything can happen. Perhaps you will be the hero who proves that the wisdom of your elven ancestors is untouched by your human blood!

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the **Eberron** Campaign Setting and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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